

BUYING HELP

INTRODUCTION

If you don't know what type of product you need, or are wondering whether or not a particular product will work with your computer, then contact *Buying Help*.

If you want to buy a new desktop or notebook computer, please provide details of how much you want to spend and the type of tasks you want your new PC to perform.

If you're looking to buy an upgrade for your computer, you need to include as much information about your current system as possible. Knowing your computer make and model, processor, amount of memory and motherboard model can help us provide more accurate advice.

Tom Royal

Our Labs Editor can recommend the best product for your specific requirements.

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Looking for a landscape printer

Q I remember reading a review of a printer that could accept A4 sheets of paper in a landscape orientation. I cut out the article, but now I need to buy such a product I can't locate it. I can't find it on the internet, either. Can you help?

James Hannah

A If you want to print A4 sheets of paper, and you want to insert them into the printer long-side first, you need to buy an A3 printer. We reviewed three A3 photo printers in last month's photo printer *Labs* review, and we occasionally review

them in the Printers & Scanners section of *What's New*. Unfortunately, without knowing exactly what kind of documents you intend to print, it's hard to make a buying recommendation.

However, it's perfectly possible to print a landscape-oriented A4 document or photo using a standard A4 printer. Look for an option called Page Setup in the File menu of your application, or select the Properties box after you've selected Print. Almost every software package and printer driver will allow you to print in landscape mode. A4 printers are far smaller, and far less expensive, than A3 models.

In search of network storage

Q I have a Dell Inspiron 6400 notebook and use a Netgear DG834PN wireless ADSL modem router to access my broadband internet connection wirelessly. I'd like to add a large external hard disk so I can record television programmes using my notebook, then watch them on my television.

Ideally, I'd like the entire system to be wireless, although I could leave a cable between my notebook and my TV. I like the look of the Western Digital 500GB My Book hard disk reviewed in *What's New: Storage*, *Shopper* January 2007, but it isn't wireless. Can I plug a device into the back of it so it can connect wirelessly to my notebook, or can I perhaps connect it directly to my router? I read your *Labs* test on network storage devices, but I don't need all the features they offer. I simply want a large storage device that can sit next to my television and which I can connect wirelessly to my notebook.

I also need to buy a USB TV tuner for my notebook computer. Is it possible to configure these products so the computer will wake from hibernation, record the programme and then hibernate again?

Chris Spraggett

A We have seen wireless routers that can connect to a standard external hard disk via a USB cable, but unfortunately the Netgear DG834PN doesn't have this feature. This means there are two ways to add a hard disk to your network: buy a network storage device, or use a standard external hard disk with a network adaptor.

If you like the Western Digital My Book external hard disk, you could connect it to the network using an adaptor. Network storage adaptors connect to an external storage device via a USB cable, and to your network either wirelessly or using a standard Ethernet socket. D-Link and SMC both make a suitable product, but

unfortunately we couldn't find either one for sale in the UK at a reasonable price.

Unless you can find an inexpensive network storage adaptor, your best choice would be to buy a network storage device. Although many of the products reviewed in our recent network-attached storage *Labs* round-up (*Shopper* May 2007) include special features such as media and FTP servers, these are all of peripheral importance. These products are designed mainly for sharing files on a network, which is exactly what you want to do. If you intend only to access files on your external hard disk from a computer, Trekstor's DataStation maxi.zul 250GB would be a good choice. It gives you 250GB of storage for just £114, but it needs a special driver on your PC. If you were to buy a network media player for your TV, it wouldn't work.

If you're planning to store lots of recorded television, try the Maxtor Shared Storage II 1TB instead. It has room for lots of films and TV programmes, and it will work with any computer without special drivers. It also has a UPnP media server, so you could fit a network video player under your TV to play back programmes without your computer.

Unfortunately, setting up a TV tuner in the way you suggest is a little more complicated. Microsoft's Windows XP Media Center Edition can wake a PC from hibernate, record a programme and then hibernate again, but when using Windows XP Home or Professional Edition you'll need a TV tuner with a scheduler application that supports this feature.

AverTV's DVB-T Volar claims to be able to wake a computer from hibernate, but when we reviewed it we found that its electronic programme guide (EPG) was tricky to use when scheduling recordings, so we can't recommend it.

Compro's VideoMate TV Gold Plus II can't use hibernate, but it can switch a computer on and off when performing scheduled recordings.

Unfortunately, it's a PCI card so it can't be installed in a notebook.

We're not aware of a USB product that would suit your needs unless you're prepared to take the drastic step

of installing Media Center first, and even then you might need to use extra utilities such as MCEStandby to make it work properly.



► A NAS device is ideal for sharing large files such as TV programmes

Struggling with camera specs

Q Following your review (*What's New: Photography, Shopper May 2007*), I bought a Nikon D40 DSLR camera. I'm very happy with it, but I want to buy a longer zoom lens so I can take photographs for a local sports club. I read in your review that it does not work with type G or D Nikon AF lenses, and that it works only with lenses marked AF-S, but the lens that came with my camera is marked both G and AF-S. Frankly, I'm baffled. What do all these letters mean, and which lenses actually work with my camera?

Tyler Smith

A Nikon's method of naming lenses with a string of letters and acronyms can be extremely confusing. All Nikon SLR cameras since the 1959 Nikon F have used the same physical lens mount, known as the F-mount, but over the years dozens of different revisions have meant that not all F-mount lenses are compatible with all Nikon SLRs. When picking a lens for the D40, there are three things to look for.

The first is distance measurement, which is indicated by the letter D. Lenses marked with the letter D are able to communicate with the camera body and tell it the distance at which the lens is focused. This helps the camera to choose exposure settings. Most modern Nikon cameras, including your D40, require D-type lenses in order to use all their features. G-type lenses work in the same way, so they are also D-type, but have no aperture setting ring. This means they work only with cameras that can control the aperture electronically. The D40 can do this, and the kit lens that is usually included when you buy it is a G-type lens. When picking a lens for your D40, look for type D or type G. G-type lenses tend to be less expensive.

The second issue concerns how the lens is focused. Older Nikon lenses, known as AF lenses, can be focused automatically by the autofocus system in the camera body. This system uses a motor in the camera that turns a tiny screw to move the elements. The D40 does not have a motor in its body. You can use these lenses, but you'll have to focus them manually. If you want to use autofocus, look for a lens marked AF-S. This indicates that the lens contains a focusing motor that the camera can control electronically, so your D40 can focus it automatically.

The letters DX refer to Nikon's set of lenses designed for digital cameras. They focus the image on to a smaller area that's ideal for the digital sensor used inside DSLR models. Your D40 is a DX camera, so you should always look for lenses marked DX. In summary, you need to look for lenses marked with both DX and AF-S, and either G or D. There are lots of AF-S models from which to choose. The 18-200mm f/3.5-5.6G AF-S DX VR IF ED will give you a huge zoom range and has image stabilisation, too, but costs almost £500. The 18-135mm f/3.5-5.6G AF-S DX IF ED is far cheaper at around £250.



▲ Nikon's D40 can't automatically focus some older lenses

Picking a PC

Q I want to replace my old PC. I've read about Vista, which seems frightening to me, but I'm aware that I might have to have it. I've looked at various adverts in *Computer Shopper*, but don't know where to start.

I am not interested in playing games, watching TV or playing video files on the PC, so I'm afraid that the PC will be overloaded with software I'll never use. All I want to do is word processing, web surfing, a little basic desktop publishing, my household accounts, editing photos, and reading and copying CDs and DVDs. Can you suggest a suitable PC?

Peter Critchett

A Most computer manufacturers will be happy to sell you a PC running the older Windows XP operating system rather than Windows Vista, if you'd prefer it. Unless you have existing software that you know will not run on Vista, though, we'd recommend choosing Vista instead. It may not be perfect, but it is in many respects an improvement over Windows XP.

If you'd like to stick with Windows, we recommend Acer's Aspire 3692WLMi. This neat notebook costs just £430 including VAT, has a great display and has more than enough power for the tasks you want to perform. It runs Windows Vista Basic, which looks much the same as Windows XP.

Alternatively, as long as you don't have any Windows software you want to reuse, you could choose an Apple computer that runs OS X. If you're prepared to make the change to using Apple's operating system, we recommend the excellent Macbook. The 2GHz Core 2 Duo version costs just under £900 and has a great display. You'll need to buy Mac-compatible software, but there are several good photo-editing packages available, including Adobe's Photoshop Elements.

If you'd prefer a desktop PC, the iMac is an equally good choice. We reviewed the model with a 24in display in *What's New: PCs, Shopper* January 2007. It is fantastic, but costs £1,350 including VAT. If this is a bit steep, there are three smaller versions, including one with a 20in screen for £1,000 and a 17in model for £800. We wouldn't recommend the cheapest £679 version, as it has a small amount of memory and cannot write DVDs. ☐



▲ If you want a computer to edit photos and you don't care for games or Windows Vista, Apple's iMac might be perfect

Selecting some security software

Q I recently discovered that the AVG Free anti-virus software I used on my notebook and desktop computers had run out. I don't want to pay to upgrade, so I've been looking for an alternative. I found a copy of Kaspersky Anti-Virus on a *Computer Shopper* cover disc, which I have installed on my notebook computer, but I still need something to protect my PC. What do you recommend?

Nick Porter

A Currently, the best choice for anti-virus software is Steganos AntiVirus 2007. We reviewed it in *Labs, Shopper* April 2007 and awarded it a Best Buy for its impressive virus-detection rates and low cost. At just £20 including VAT, it's very good value.

You can continue to use AVG's free anti-virus product, which you can download from <http://free.grisoft.com>.

AVG didn't perform as well as Steganos in our tests, but it did detect more viruses than some of the more expensive software we tested, and it's certainly the best free anti-virus package available. We awarded it a rating of four stars out of a possible five.



▲ AVG provides free protection from viruses designed to harm your PC